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Extract from Wythe, Alexander. Chinese researches.

THE BIBLE IN CHINA.

Since the completion of the canon of the Christian Scriptures, few ages have passed without furnishing assailants of the sacred record ; but these are probably outnumbered by the champions of the Book, who have boldly placed themselves on the defensive. If much has been written that is calculated to give pain to the humble believer, we have also to thank the controversy for calling into existence a class of writings in defence of the faith, which have received as yet no satisfactory answer, and bid fair to remain unanswered. Looking at the vain conflict of opinions that have emanated from the minds of philosophic thinkers, and the unsatisfying character of all other systems of religion apologists for the Bible have dwelt on the *necessity* of a Divine revelation, an argument which they have wielded with much effect.

I have no intention now to enter on this as a general question ; but narrowing it down to the occasion, would say that there is nothing peculiar in the Chinese as a nation, to render them an exception to the argument.

The few dim traditions that speak of their golden age give us but scanty information regarding the moral and religious aspect of the people, or the doctrines propounded by their sages.

Confucius indeed in later times stands forward as the professed continuator and strenuous upholder of their principles. But powerful as are the claims of this great teacher, and wonderful as is the influence he has exerted in all subsequent ages, the history and present aspect of the nation strongly testify to the insufficiency of his doctrines, to satisfy the cravings of human

nature. It is but an act of justice to praise him for the purity and excellence of most of his lessons ; at the same time it must be admitted that some of the greatest life problems are utterly ignored by him. We are told indeed that such was his sincerity in his religious observances, that he worshipped the spiritual existences as if he actually stood in their presence.¹ But when Chi-lu, an inquisitive disciple, interrogated the Master touching religious worship and a future life, the memorable answer which he handed down for the instruction of after ages is of the most vague and evasive character. "While you are insufficient for the service of men, how can you serve the spirits? While you do not understand life, what can you know about death?"² Tszekung, another disciple, on one occasion asked for a general rule of life in a comprehensive form. Confucius replies :—"Sympathetic benevolence is the rule. What you would not have others do to you, do not practice towards them."³ A maxim worthy to immortalize the sage ; and indeed the code of ethics he laid down is for the greater part unobjectionable, even from a Christian standpoint. Had man nothing but a moral nature, his teachings might be well adapted to secure the end proposed. But alas ! the depravity of the human heart is left out of the account ; and man is consequently utterly unable to effect that self-renovation which lies at the foundation of the whole scheme. The system is a beautifully-shaped automaton, but wanting the vital principle, so that it can only be kept in operation by artificial means. Confucius spent the greater part of a busy life, endeavouring to establish his principles ; but at the close he had the mortification to find they had not made the progress he anticipated ; and he died lamenting the fact that there was not one of the princes of the empire prepared to adopt his teaching. But it was not to remain so. The influence of his character and example, added to the purity of his lessons, gradually gave rise to posthumous honours, far exceeding anything that had been accorded during life.

The principles of Confucius however were interpreted in different ways. Other masters sought to gain the ascendancy over the popular mind ; various and opposing were the views set forth ; and some of these have been handed down to our own days. Thus we find Yang-chû boldly discarding the doctrine of a future life, and teaching men to give themselves up to the pleasures of sense as the only true wisdom. This was in fact a

1. *Analects.* Book 3, ch. 12.

2. *Ibid.* *Ibid* 11, ch. 11.

3. *Ibid.* *Ibid* 16, ch. 23.

very distorted scheme of Epicureanism ; and it is not surprising that the frigid code of Confucianism left the hearts of the people a prey to such pernicious counsels.

Another philosopher, named Mo-Jî, taught the doctrine of Universal Love, in a modified form ; and his opinions, we learn, made considerable progress in the empire. But his teaching wanted the sustaining principle ; human nature was unequal to its requirements ; and in the hands of his disciples, it appears to have run out into disorders social and political.

The doctrines of both these teachers were alike censured and confuted by Mencius, whose views have been preserved in the book known by his name. The questions regarding human nature, which are almost passed unnoticed, or merely hinted at by Confucius, are openly treated by this philosopher. The radical goodness of human nature is unequivocally declared, and illustrated by the phenomena of daily life ; while all his maxims are based on the assumption that perfect virtue is attainable by man, simply acting out the dictates of his nature. His views on that subject have left a great impression on the minds of the Chinese of subsequent generations.

But other doctrines on this subject were taught at the same period. For instance we find the philosopher Kaou maintaining that the nature of man is an open blank, susceptible of impressions either good or bad, but with no original bias towards one side or the other. His views are discussed by Mencius, whose condemnatory arguments have been deemed sufficiently conclusive.

Hsün-tsze, who lived at a somewhat later period, was for a time, a formidable opponent of the views of Mencius. Building on the same premises, he strenuously contends for the original depravity of human nature. As a teacher he stood on a par with Mencius for several generations ; but the latter ultimately secured the ascendancy among influential minds ; and Seun-tsze is merely referred to now as one of the philosophers of antiquity.

There are plausible points in both theories, and the consideration of these would no doubt attract adherents to each side ; but at the same time, the difficulties that attach to both would be equally apt to give rise to doubts which the theories of these teachers were insufficient to clear away. In order to evade these difficulties, Yang-Hsiung, another of the early luminaries, struck out a middle course, maintaining that the principles of good and evil are both inherent in human nature, and that this duality

manifests itself from the very earliest period of existence ; the preponderance to one side or the other being merely the result of cultivation.

These and other modifications divided the opinions of the learned for many centuries, but none have retained a firmer place in the popular mind than the doctrine of Mencius. This, however, can scarcely be said to be more than an abstraction, and very inadequate to meet the aspirations of man as an intelligent and immortal being. The doctrines of the literati throw no light on questions of the greatest interest, which lie at the foundation of all religion properly so called. They tell us nothing of a future state, and one side of human nature is altogether ignored by them. Abstractions are not calculated to engage the affections ; and however excellent the moral maxims of the ancient philosophers, while the exciting motive was the mere love of virtue, a great void was left unfilled in the imaginations of the mass. Made for eternity, the spiritual part of man claims to know something regarding his ultimate destiny ; and any system which leaves that element out of account must so far fail in its influence on the heart. Hence we cease to wonder at the facility with which Buddhism got a footing, and made its way among the Chinese.

A legend preserved in the national history, tells of Ming-ti an emperor of the Han, moved by a dream, sending an embassy to India, which returned with a party of Buddhist priests ; and these having brought their sacred classics, inculcated their doctrines under imperial patronage and protection. This may be true, but still it is a very imperfect statement of the question. There was a spiritual dearth in the land, and Buddhism offered the only pabulum of the class required, to say nothing of its quality. Enough was found in the subtle treatises of this system to occupy and interest many of the cultivated intellects, and a want in the religious condition of the nation was to some extent supplied by the upward tendency it gave to the thoughts of the devotee, teaching him to look beyond the present state of existence, and thus gratifying the longing for immortality inherent in the human breast. It appealed to the hopes and fears of its votaries, and its plan of rewards and retributions was made appreciable to the humblest adherents. In it men felt they were not merely combining to carry into effect some abstract principle, but that their every action carried with it some corresponding result. Ages have rolled on, and Buddhism, if it has not strengthened its stakes, has at least lengthened its cords. Almost without a rival for thousands of years, the popular

part of the scheme has had a widespread influence over the masses ; but as to raising them in the scale of humanity, or advancing their moral interests, it has been weighed in the balances and found wanting.

Taouism, *as a religious system*, is but a poor copy of Buddhism. In its present aspect, the production of a later age, scarcely a trace is left of the profound speculations of its reputed founder. It has already sunk deeper in corruption than its prototype, and even its most rigid followers will scarcely contend that it is destined to be the renovator of degraded humanity.

Such are some of the prominent characteristics in the mental and moral systems inculcated by the teachers of China through a long succession of ages. The result is patent to all. Can we say regarding them, that no higher guide than the mere unaided efforts of human intellect is necessary to lead men into the way of eternal truth ?

In the teaching of Confucius and others of the old masters, many of the truths and maxims of an earlier traditional faith have been handed down. The belief in the unity and personality of God, the doctrine of filial piety, and other traces of the primitive religion, have acted as a preservative in the history of the empire. The excellence of many of the lessons and ethical institutes of the ancient philosophers is unimpeachable ; but these are insufficient to change the heart, or restore mankind to a state of purity. They are of the earth, earthy.

One can appreciate the efforts of Buddhism to escape from a sin-polluted world and soar to the regions of bliss in other realms ; but we see in the system little beyond the imaginary dreamings of a people given up to an endless round of speculation. It may be said of its founders and propagators : "They have hewn out to themselves broken cisterns."

We may freely admit that there is a great verity imbedded in the work of Laou-keun on Eternal Reason, or the *Logos*;—but it is a sealed book to the nation at large, who practically ignore the Author of nature.

Even the pantheistic teachings of the great Choo-hsi may have fragments of truth, although their efficacy is greatly nullified by the Godless system in which they find a place.

Deliberately discarding each and all of these systems, the result of the mental striving of a highly civilized nation, through a period upwards of two thousand years, we are as little prepared to accord our suffrage to the wretched eclecticism which is so prevalent ; a structure composed of the heterogenous materials of

antiquated fabrics, but wanting in the perfection and symmetry indicative of a well-conceived plan.

In view then of the grievous deficiencies in every system which China has been able to produce, I do not hesitate to say that its religious history plainly indicates the need of a Divine revelation. That need is amply provided for in the Christian scriptures. Hence the obligation resting on the Christian church, to give the Bible to the Chinese.

I know the objections which are frequently thrown out, even by believers,—that the Chinese are too apathetic to care about religion, or too self conceited to receive doctrines imported from a foreign country.

To say nothing of the unphilosophical character of such objections, I maintain that they are by no means borne out by facts. The reception of Buddhism by the nation at large is a sufficient guarantee that the people are as capable of adopting new opinions as any other nation; and the zeal needful for the maintenance of the system through so many centuries, were it nothing more, amply vindicates them from the charge of inherent apathy. To the believer, it should be sufficient to quote the words of inspiration:—"The Lord looketh upon all the inhabitants of the earth. He fashioneth hearts alike."

We do not indeed find the rampant fanaticism that characterizes the Hindu; nor is the spirit of self immolation and voluntary martyrdom at all prevalent. But it is not difficult to point to instances of religious zeal among the Chinese, perhaps unsurpassed by any people. It may suffice to quote the Buddhist priests, who, in their fervour for the purity of the faith, left their native soil, traversing long and unknown tracks to distant countries, enduring privation, toil and danger, and accomplishing journies which would be counted marvellous, even in these days of universal locomotion. Such was the priest Fa-hien, who passed beyond the Chinese frontier in the year 399, crossed Tartary, penetrated the mountains of Tibet. By means of cords, flying bridges and steps hewn in the rock, he cleared all but unapproachable chasms, and precipices 8,000 feet high, and returned to his native land by way of Java, having spent about fifteen years wandering through the various countries of India, and travelled between nine and ten thousand miles. Such were Sun-yun and Hway-säng, two devotees of the same fraternity, who traversed the countries of Badakshan, Oudjana, Kandahar and Eastern Persia, early in the 6th century, moved by a spirit of pious zeal. Many others fearlessly gave themselves to like enterprises, and have left a fund of infor-

mation of much value regarding Central Asia. But none have attained a greater fame than the priest Heuen-chwang, who left his native country in the early part of the 7th century, and after more than sixteen years spent in the cause of his religion, returned to China, to end his days in the further development of the same spirit. Speaking of Heuen-chwang's travels, a celebrated orientalist¹ says:—"There we learn something of the man himself, and of that silent enthusiasm which supported him in his arduous work. There we see him braving the dangers of the desert, scrambling along glaciers, crossing over torrents, and quietly submitting to the brutal violence of Indian Thugs. There we see him rejecting the tempting invitations of Khans, Kings and Emperors, and quietly pursuing among strangers, within the bleak wall of the cell of a Buddhist college, the study of a foreign language, the key to the sacred literature of his faith.—His whole life belonged to the faith in which he was born, and the object of his labour was not so much to perfect himself as to benefit others. He was an honest man. And strange, and stiff, and absurd, and outlandish as his outward appearance may seem, there is something in the face of that poor Chinese monk, with his yellow skin and his small oblique eyes, that appeals to our sympathy—something in his life, and the work of his life, that places him by right among the heroes of Greece, the martyrs of Rome, the knights of the crusades, the explorers of the Arctic regions—something that makes us feel it a duty to inscribe his name on the roll of the 'forgotten worthies' of the human race." "He deserved to have lived in better times, and we almost grudge so high and noble a character to a country not our own, and to a religion unworthy of such a man." Men of such a stamp are by no means a rarity; and instances from the modern history of the nation might also be adduced. Some indeed strike us with wonder, and utterly remove the point from general aspersions cast against the Chinese. The deadening element is in the religion they have adopted, rather than in the people adopting it.

Assuming then that the Bible is the only book adapted to meet the spiritual wants of China, let us proceed to examine what has been done towards furnishing them with the sacred oracle.

Notwithstanding the decay of the traditional and patriarchal religion, it is observable how the monotheistical element prevails in the most ancient of the philosophical treatises now extant. This has induced some to maintain the early settlement of a portion of the Israelites in China, who had diffused such a knowledge of

¹ Max Müller.

the truths of the sacred record, that they had become obscurely perpetuated in the teachings of these wise men of old. On a careful persual of such ancient writings, it is not difficult to admit the plausibility of the above hypothesis; nor is their anything extravagant in the notion of such a document arresting the attention of the thoughtful in all age and nations. While allowing, however, that the Hebrew records may have been not without a certain influence, in giving a tone to the writings of the early philosophers and teachers, it is obvious that this theory has been pushed too far by some of the Jesuit fathers, such as Premare, Cibot, Bouvet and others, who first brought these works to the knowledge of the European public. Some of these have professed to trace, not merely the unity of God, but also certain details regarding the creation, paradise, the tree of life, primeval happiness, the fall, the temptation, the Redeemer, his birth by a virgin and other Christian verities. It is evident there is much that is fanciful in such deductions, which have been denounced and rejected by more sober writers in the same communion. Although there is nothing impossible in the Chinese having had a knowledge of the Hebrew scriptures at a very early period, yet history furnishes no direct evidence to that effect; although it may be there are occasional vestiges in the national literature to corroborate such a supposition. If any part of the Old Testament however was translated, the manuscripts have probably long since perished, for recent researches all lead to the conclusion that there is nothing of the kind now extant.

We are not left so much in the dark, however, regarding the operations of the early Christian settlers in China in the matter. In 1625, a stone tablet which had lain embedded in the ground for nearly eight centuries, was dug up at Si-ngan in Shen-si. From this interesting relic, which contains a summary outline of probably the first Christian mission to China, we learn that some emissaries of the Nestorian college at Nisibis in Persia, fired with a zeal for the spiritual welfare of this nation, braved the dangers of a journey through Central Asia, and reached the capital of China in 635. From the same source we derive information of much interest, touching our present subject; indicative of the great importance these pioneers attached to having the sacred record translated into the language of the country. In the commencement of the inscription there is an evident allusion to the Old Testament, in the statement, "The declarations of the *ancient law*, as given by the *twenty-four sages*, were fulfilled,"* on occasion

* 圓廿四聖有說之舊法

of the advent of the Messiah. An equally clear indication of the New Testament writings is found in the statement, that when the Messiah ascended to his original dignity, "*twenty-seven sacred books* remained;" † presenting an exact correspondence with the number held by the early Nestorians, and now acknowledged by the Christian Church at large. With this identification we are then told that the apostle Alopum came from Syria, "watching the azure clouds, and bringing with him the true *Sacred books*." ‡ Reaching the metropolis, after an introduction to the emperor, it is said,—“The *Sacred books* were translated in the imperial library.” || A subsequent part gives a portion of an imperial edict issued in 638, in which it is stated, that Alopum had “brought the *Sacred books* and images from afar, and presented them at the metropolis;” ¶ after which follows a declaration of the excellence of the Christian system, giving the impression that his majesty must have had the means of investigating the principles of the faith, through the medium of translations. In the ode which forms the principal part of this inscription, we find in the record of incidents during the reign of Tae-tsung, it is said,—“The *Scriptures* were translated, and churches were built.” *

From these several notices, preserved to us in the durable records of a stone tablet, we gather with much confidence the impression that the New Testament, at least, was translated into Chinese during the first half of the 7th century; and this seems the more probable, when we consider that at that period, the emperor was engaged in a most extensive undertaking, translating the Buddhist works which had been recently brought from India by the Chinese traveller Heuen-chwang. The monastery where this work was executed was at a recent period still pointed out at Si-ngan. There is no supposition, amounting even to a probability, to place against these statements. Although the translation may have been completed, however, yet, as the art of printing was not generally practised till several centuries later, there was then no less laborious method of multiplying copies than by manuscript, which must necessarily have greatly circumscribed the circulation. By the time that typography came into general use, the Nestorian religion was probably on the decline; and

† 經留廿七部。

‡ 占青雲而載異經。

|| 翻經書殿。

¶ 遠將經像來獻上京。

* 翻經建寺。

with a fading vitality, it is easy to conceive that the interest in the Holy Oracle might diminish; so that we hear very little subsequently of the actual existence of this ancient version.

We are not, however, left altogether without indications on the subject. In an incidental notice of a journey by Ibn Wahab, an enterprising Arab, to Chang-ngan, the capital of China, in the 9th century, we find an account of an interview he had with the emperor. The latter having produced a series of portraits for his inspection, Ibn Wahab proceeds to say:—"I recognized on these leaves the portraits of the prophets; at the same time I made my vows on their account, which caused a movement of my lips. The emperor, not knowing that I recognized the prophets, asked me through the interpreter why I moved my lips. To which I replied: 'I was praying for the prophets.' The emperor enquired how I had recognized them and I replied: 'By means of their distinctive characteristics. Thus, there is Noah in the ark, who was saved with his family, when the Most High God sent down the waters, and the whole earth was submerged with its inhabitants; only Noah and his company escaped from the deluge.' At these words the emperor laughed, and said: 'You have guessed right in recognizing this as Noah; as to the submersion of the whole earth, we do not admit the fact. The deluge could only have embraced a portion of the earth; it neither reached our country nor India.' Ibn Wahab states that he feared to refute what had fallen from the emperor, and to make use of the arguments he had at command, considering that the prince would not have been willing to admit them, but he continued:—"There is Moses and his rod, with the children of Israel.' The emperor said: 'That is true, but Moses appeared on a very narrow stage, and his people shewed themselves ill-disposed towards him.' I added: 'There is Jesus on an ass, surrounded by his apostles.' The emperor said: 'He appeared but a short time on the scene. His mission scarcely lasted more than thirty months.' Ibn Wahab continued to pass in review the different prophets; but we shall only repeat a part of what he told us. Ibn Wahab added that below each prophet's figure there was a long inscription, which he supposed contained the name of the prophet, the name of their country, and the circumstances which accompanied their mission."¹ From the preceding extract, there is reason to believe that the emperor must have been to some extent acquainted with the truths of Christian revelation; and

¹ Relation des voyages faits per les Arabes et les Persans dans l'Inde et à la Chine. Paris, 1895. pp.83, &c.

it is fair to assume that he may have been in possession of that translation of the Scriptures which was made under the direction of his great ancestor Tae-tsung.

Nearly four centuries later, we have the testimony of John de Plana Carpini, an Italian friar, who went on a mission, partly political, partly religious, from Pope Innocent IV, to the Mongolian court in 1245. In a very brief account which he gives of China, gathered from report, it is remarkable that he twice alludes to the fact of the Scriptures existing in that language. He says:—"But the men of Kitai (China) spoken of above, are pagans, having a particular kind of written character, and as it is said, the *Old and New Testaments*; they possess Biographies of their Forefathers, have hermits, and houses made in the fashion of churches, in which they themselves worshipped in former times; they say also that they have a number of saints. They worship one God, they honour the Lord Jesus Christ, they believe in eternal life, but are not baptized; they honour and reverence our *Scriptures*, respect Christians, and give much alms; they seem to be a tolerably kind and courteous people."¹ There can be no doubt, I think, that the Scriptures alluded to in this passage was the version in use among the Nestorians; and there seems a strong probability that it was the same, or a revision of that translated under the patronage of Tae-tsung of the T'ang.

A traveller nearly contemporary with the above, William de Rubruk, a Franciscan monk, who went on an embassy from Louis IX of France to the Khan of the Tartars in 1253, speaking of China, says: "The Nestorians there know nothing. For they repeat their services, and have the *Sacred books* in Syriac, a language which they do not understand, so that they sing as the monks do with us without knowing the grammar; and hence have become totally corrupt."² At first sight there appears a discrepancy between this and the previous quotation; but if we consider the actual practice of the Church of Rome, we shall see that there is no real inconsistency between the two statements; for it was only in accordance with the general practice of the Nestorian church to use the Syriac in their ritual services; nor is it to be supposed that this practice would be interrupted by the fact of the Bible having been translated into the language of the country.

¹ Relation des Mongols ou Tartares par le frère Jean du Plan de Carpin. Paris, 1838. p. 257.

² Recueil de Voyages et de Memoires publié par la Société de Geographie. Tome 4. p. 293.

The interesting narrative of Marco Polo's residence in China also states how the Four Gospels of the Christians were publicly honoured by Kubla-khan and his courtiers.¹ But this probably also refers to the Syriac version ; and other authorities may be quoted to the same effect.

Almost the only relic that has come down to us of the Sacred books or formularies of this ancient and once flourishing church of the Nestorians in China, is a Syriac manuscript in the same character as that on the borders of the Si-ngan inscription. This was discovered about the year 1725, in the possession of a Mohammedan, the descendant of Christian or Jewish ancestors from the West. On examination, it was found to contain the Old Testament, from the beginning of the 25th chapter to the end of Isaiah, the twelve Minor Prophets, Jeremiah, Lamentations and Daniel, including Bel and the Dragon, with the Psalms, two Songs of Moses, the Song of the Three Holy Children, and a selection of hymns.²

A recent work indeed hazards the notion that, "there is reason for supposing that in certain mountain district, of China whole villages and tribes of Nestorian Christians are still found, and that they have preserved to this day the Scriptures among them."³ Should this supposition be supported by evidence, it would prove a most interesting fact, and although it may not be said to be entirely destitute of probability, yet for the present it can scarcely be considered beyond the range of conjecture. The suggestion may receive some countenance from a passage in a letter by the late Rev. J. Goddard, Ningpo.

He says :—"A few days since, a respectable looking stranger came into our chapel, and listened with much apparent attention to the sermon. After service, he stopped to converse. He said that he and his ancestors had worshipped only one God. He knew of Moses and Jesus and Mary, said he was not a Romanist nor Mohammedan, neither had he seen our books, but that the doctrine was handed down from his ancestors. He did not know where they obtained it, nor for how many generations they had followed it. He is from one of the western provinces of China, and said that in his native place there are some thirty families of the same religion."⁴ There is something in the above statement to

¹ Navigations et viaggi. Ramusio. Venice, 1556, Vol. 2, fol. 20.

² Notices et extraits des Manuscrits de la Bibliotheque Royale. Paris, 1831. Tome 12 pp. 277, &c.

³ Christianity in China. London, 1853. p. 32, note.

⁴ New York Observer for Sept. 2, 1852. p. 283.

awaken a feeling of Christian interest ; and it is to be hoped that, with the advance of Christian missions in the interior, we may ascertain for a certainty whether any vestige of the Nestorian church still exists, and whether the ancient translation of the Scriptures is to be found, either whole or in part, among them.

Towards the close of the 13th century, when the Mongols had possession of the empire, John de Monte Corvino, a Franciscan monk of Calabria, who, when on an embassy from Pope Nicholas IV to Kubla-khan in Cambalu, translated a portion of the Scriptures into the language of the dynasty. Having taken up his residence there, he was afterwards made Bishop of the diocese ; and in a letter dated 8th January, 1306, he writes :—" I have acquired a competent knowledge of the Tartar language and literature, which is the common language of the Tartars, and have now translated into that language and character the whole of the New Testament and the Psalms of David, which I have caused to be written in their most beautiful style, and I write and read, and preach freely and openly the testimony of the law of Christ."¹ It seems to have been the desire of the venerable prelate of Cambalu that the natives under his supervision should obtain a knowledge of the Word of Life.

How far he succeeded in this end, we have no certain information ; but we are warranted in saying that he was conscientiously carrying out the objects of his mission, in giving out the Scriptures in the language of the people ; for as we learn from a letter of Pope Benedict XII, about thirty years later, to some Tartar converts, a belief in the inspiration of the Old and New Testaments formed an essential article of the Catholic faith.²

If this work of Corvini was ever put to press, the probability is that it has long ceased to exist ; for I have not heard of any ancient copies ; while the translation of the Old and New Testaments into the Mongolian language, by the devoted missionaries Swan and Stallybrass, is now used by the mission of the Russian Greek Church to the Mongols, as well as Protestant missionaries in the north of China.

The Jesuits first made their appearance in China in the 16th century, and though they prosecuted the objects of their mission with a praiseworthy vigour, we hear nothing of a complete translation of the Scriptures having been published by them. Matteo Ricci, indeed, in a letter to Yu Chun-he, a metropolitan high functionary, early in the 17th century, excuses himself from the task, on the

¹ *Historia Tartarorum ecclesiastica*. Mosheim, Appendix. No. XXXIV, p. 117.

² *Historia Tartarorum ecclesiastica*. Mosheim, Appendix, No. LXXVIII, p. 173.

plea of pressure of other matters.* The plea may have been so far valid ; but it is probable other motives also weighed with this distinguished missionary.

When the celebrated convert, Seu Kwang-ke, addressed a memorial to the throne in 1616, in defence of the Jesuit missionaries who had been denounced by the Board of Rites at Nanking as traitors, he proposed a scheme for the translation of the Scriptures, to be used as evidence in their case.† Nothing further however seems to have come of the suggestion.

Several isolated and select portions of the Scriptures may be found in the Chinese publications of the Roman Catholics, and we are not without evidence that such detached portions have incited a desire among the natives to have more from the same source.

Selections from Scripture elegantly illustrated were at one time published, but they are now of an extreme rarity, and only to be met in the cabinets of the curious. In some works on the fine arts, we find specimen pages of these Christian books given as *Chêf d'œuvres* of wood engraving.

The most ample translation that has appeared in print from that source is the *Shing king chih keac*,‡ by Emanuel Diaz, a Portuguese missionary, finished in 1636, being a version of the Gospels with the portions of other parts of Holy Scripture, several Sundays and feast days throughout the year, as appointed by the rubric, with an extended commentary, and reflections on each separate portion. This is written in a simple style, and has been recently republished.

Commendations of the Word of God, however, are not rare in the older Christian publications ;¹ and these seem to have excited the suspicion of the more acute natives towards the book which was not accessible to them. Thus we find the complaint brought forward by Yang Kwang-seen, a high officer of the Astronomical Board, in a brochure which he published against Christianity, about the year 1660, that Mathew Ricci had suppressed some parts of the faith, in order to impose upon the people ; while in a later publication, entitled *Puh teh è*, the same scholar remarks, " That Father Ricci who came to China in past years had quoted his *Bible*, and the comments of his holy men, in order to palliate his

* 辨學遺蹟 *P'ên hëo è tuh.*

† 辨學疏稿 *P'ên hëo soo kaou.*

‡ 聖經直解 *Shing king chih keac.*

¹ See Premare's *Notitia Linguae Sinicae* p. 233, &c.

vicious doctrines;"¹ a charge which he extends to other missionaries also.

From the remarks of Father Le Comte, we learn that a project was in contemplation by some of the missionaries in the 17th century for a translation of the Bible into Chinese, but circumstances proved adverse to the undertaking. Writing to Father De-la Chaize, the confessor to Louis 14th of France, he says:—"A translation of the Missal had been desired in order to say Mass in Chinese, according to the permission that had been obtained for that object; and an exact version of the *Holy Scriptures*. The Missal has been completed, and Father Couplet presented it to the Pope some years since; after having maturely considered the matter, however, it was not judged expedient to make use of it; and they continue to say Mass in Latin, according to the usual custom. As for the complete version of the *Bible*, there are such weighty reasons why it should not yet be given to the public, that it would be rash imprudence to make use of it; the more so that the substance of the Gospel, and even the most edifying parts of it, have already been explained in several of their books."²

We have authority however for saying that the Bible was translated, although not printed; for Dr. J. F. Gemelli Careri, an Italian gentleman, who visited Peking in 1696, in the confidence of the missionaries, while remarking on the self esteem of the Chinese, adds:—"The European missionaries have begun to undeceive them by printing five hundred books of the law of God, which they composed in less than a century; having translated the works of St. Thomas, and also the *Holy Scriptures*."³

It is probable indeed from the occasional notices that we meet with, that more versions than one may have been executed. Thus we are told that the New Testament in Chinese was in use in Father Ripa's Chinese college at Naples, at the beginning of the present century.⁴ In the earlier part of Dr. Morrison's residence in China, he was on several occasions distinctly told, by missionaries and converts of the church of Rome, that the Old and New Testaments had been translated, and were in use among the Christians in Peking;⁵ and from one of the body, he procured a

1 *Tratados Historicos, y Religiosos de la Monarchia de China*. Navarette p. 357.

2 *Nouveaux Memoires sur l'état present de la Chine*. Le Comte. Paris, 1701. Tome 2, pp. 223, 224.

3 *Giro del Mondo*. Naples, 1700. Tome 4, p. 198.

4 *Memoirs of Father Ripa*. London, 1861. p. 159.

5 *Memoirs of the life and labours of Robert Morrison*, D. D. vol 1, pp. 169, 210. 348.

translation of the Gospels, made by a missionary early in the century.¹ In the British Museum there is a manuscript volume in Chinese containing a Harmony of the Gospels, the Acts of the Apostles, and all the Epistles of Paul, excepting that to the Hebrews, of which there is only the first chapter. The author of this manuscript is not known, but it was brought to England by Mr. Hodgson of the East India Company in 1739, he having obtained it at Canton, and give it to Sir Hans Sloane. Along with the collection of MSS. belonging to the latter, it came into possession of the Museum.²

Previous translations, however, do not appear to have been considered very satisfactory, if we may trust Abbe Dubois, a renegade Indian missionary, who writing under date August 7th 1815, makes the following statement, with a view to disparage the labours of Protestant missionaries:—"About twenty-five years ago, the French missionaries, in the province of Sutchuen in China, were earnestly requested by the congregation *De Propaganda Fide* at Rome to translate the Gospel into Chinese, and send a copy to them. The missionaries answered, that as the Chinese language did not admit of a literal translation, they had a long time before, compiled a work in Chinese containing the history and moral of the Gospel, for the use of the congregations, and that nothing more could be satisfactorily executed on the subject; yet, as the request was urgent, they prepared, with the assistance of their best informed proselytes, a translation of the Gospel of St. Matthew, a copy of which they sent to Rome, informing, at the same time, the congregation *De Propaganda*, that the translation of this Gospel alone, obtained with the assistance of many well-educated natives, had cost them considerable labour and trouble; adding that this literal translation differed so widely from the Chinese style, that even their converts would hardly refrain from laughing in perusing it."³ Now the inference which the Abbé obviously wishes his readers to draw from the above statement is very clear; but if all his reasonings are based on a similar foundation, there is little difficulty in estimating them at their true value. We have now the most triumphant answer to the argument he wishes to establish.

1 Thirteenth Report of the British and Foreign Bible Society. 1817. p. 15.

2 The following note is affixed to the manuscript. "MS: Or: 22. XXXC. Evangelia quatuor Sinice MSS. This Transcript was made at Canton in 1738 and 1739, by order of Mr. Hodgson, junr., who says it has been collated with care, and found very correct. Given by him to Sir Hans Sloane in Sept. 1739.

3 Letters on the state of Christianity in India. London, 1823 pp. 30, 40.

I find there is in the library of the Propaganda at Rome a translation of the New Testament into Chinese, in seven volumes, by J. Basset,¹ but have no knowledge of who the author was, or the date of translation.

We see then that up to the commencement of the present century, no version of the Scriptures had been published, as far as our information goes; and if translations existed, they were confined to private hands, and not available to the people at large.

The period in question was specially marked by a new development of Christian life, in the formation of those large societies which had for their object the extension of gospel truth to the uttermost bounds of the habitable globe; and it was left for the Protestant Church to have the honour of giving to the Chinese the Bible in their own language.

It is remarkable that two independent chains of events were working contemporaneously towards the same object. The first decided action in the matter is due to the Rev. Claudius Buchanan, Vice-Provost of the College of Fort William at Calcutta. Soon after the foundation of this college in 1800, a department was appointed for translating the Scriptures into the oriental languages; and besides the several dialects peculiar to India, the directors turned their attention towards securing a version for China. Mr. Joannes Lassar, an Armenian Christian, and native of Macao, being tolerably proficient in the Chinese language, was appointed Professor of the same, his special duty being to translate the Scriptures; a work which he began in 1804, or early in the following year. After some three or four years, he removed to the Baptist mission at Serampore, where the work was continued under the superintendence of the Rev. Joshua Marshman, a gentleman who had attained such a proficiency in Chinese as to fit him to take a great part of the responsibility on himself. By their joint labours, and competent native Chinese assistance, the whole Bible was brought to a conclusion in 1820, and printed at Serampore, by 1822. This, which was the first known entire printed version of the Scriptures in Chinese, was a remarkable monument of persevering industry and untiring zeal, and must rank as not the least conspicuous among the multifarious labours of the devoted and self-denying Marshman; sixteen years having been spent in its production. The version as might be expected is rude, and to a degree unidiomatic, as most first versions in the oriental languages necessarily are; but although it has not been circulated

¹ *Melanges Asiatiques*. Kemusat. Paris, 1825. Tome 1. pp. 12, 13.

to the extent perhaps anticipated by its pious author, yet it has doubtless been useful in promoting the great object of the Chinese mission. It would be unfair to withhold from Dr. Marshman the tribute of praise due to his talents, his learning, and his fervour in the Christian cause; but it has been thought that he was going beyond the legitimate sphere of his operations in devoting so much time to the Chinese version. On this point his son remarks:—"At this distance of time, however, and on an impartial review of the circumstances and wants of the Serampore Mission, the appropriation of Mr. Marshman's strength to a distant object of doubtful expediency cannot be regarded without some feeling of regret."¹

Reverting to the year 1802, we find the attention of the public in England drawn towards the state of religion in China, by the Rev. W. Mosely, who published a memoir "on the importance and practicability of printing the Sacred Scriptures in the Chinese language, and circulating them in that vast empire." This was sent to the Society for promoting Christian Knowledge that same year by the Archbishop of Canterbury, together with a note from himself on the subject. The matter was referred to the East India Mission Committee, but we do not hear of any action thereon.

It was not however destined to fall to the ground. The question, once mooted, had set many minds a working; and unpropitious as were the first efforts, the work was destined to proceed. In 1804, the British and Foreign Bible Society was established, the special cause of its formation being to supply the Welsh with Bibles in their own language. The next object that came before them was the question of furnishing the Chinese with the Bible. Dr. Antonio Montucci, who had given some attention to the Chinese language, drew the attention of the Committee to the existence of the Manuscript Harmony in the British Museum, before mentioned. Should it be thought expedient to print it, he offered his service as editor; earnestly recommending its publication, "for the benefit of three hundred millions of people." The Committee were to some extent prepared for such a proposal, by the recent perusal of Mr. Mosely's memoir; and they forthwith set on foot the necessary preliminary inquiries. On procuring estimates for the printing, however, the extraordinary price proposed was such as to decide them to abandon the enterprise, for the time; one thousand copies being estimated at little less than two thousand five hundred pounds, and five thousand copies at more than six thousand pounds.

¹ The Life and Times of Carey, Marshman, and Ward London, 1859. p. 245.

It will be seen, however, that the Manuscript Harmony was not altogether fruitless. From an early period in the history of the London Missionary Society, some of the founders, in their benevolent review of the state of the heathen world, had in anticipation extended their operations to China, scarcely second in importance to any other nation, as being the dominant power in Eastern Asia, and containing about a third of the world's population. To many the difficulties of such a project appeared altogether appalling; and so imperfect was the knowledge generally possessed regarding China, that some doubted the practicability of acquiring the language to any tolerable degree.

A mission to China was proposed, however, and warmly approved by the Directors. The more immediate object proposed to this mission was the acquisition of the language, and the translation of the Scriptures. About the end of 1804, Robert Morrison, then a missionary candidate, was appointed to China as his station, and proved to be the right man in the right place. The Manuscript Harmony was placed in his hands, and with the assistance of Yong Sam-tak, a Chinese then in London, he transcribed the whole;¹ and this formed the basis of his future work.

So little favour did the object of his mission receive at first from the East India Company, that Morrison was refused a passage by their ships, and found it necessary to proceed to New York, where he shipped for China. On September 4th, 1807, he reached his destination, and from that time set himself with untiring zeal towards the completion of the translation. Many of the gentlemen of the Company's factory at Canton looked with much jealousy and fear upon Morrison's translatorial advances, while others were favourable to the project. The remarks of Mr. Roberts, the chief of the English Factory, while on his death-bed, do honour to that gentleman, and are worthy of the representative of a Christian nation. His words were:—"I see not why your translating the Sacred Scriptures into the Chinese language might not be avowed, if occasion called for it. We could with reason answer the Chinese thus:—'This volume we deem the best of books. Mr. Morrison happens to be able and willing to render it into your language, in order that it may be legible to you; your approval or disapproval of it rests entirely with yourselves; we conceive he has done a good work.'" Morrison continued single-handed at his work till the summer of 1813,

¹ Morrison's MS. is still in the library of the Morrison Education Society at Hongkong.

when he was joined by the Rev. W. Milne ; but through the jealousy of the Macao government, the latter was obliged to leave China a few days after his arrival. The two friends continued to prosecute the translation in conjunction, however, though not together, one being in China and the other at Malacca. Each taking separate books, and the whole passing finally under the revising hand of Morrison, the complete Bible was brought to a termination in 1822 ; but before it had issued from the press, Dr. Milne was called to his rest in June of the same year. The following year the complete work was in type, being the second entire version published within two years. This was the result of seventeen years of close application, severe toil, much anxiety, and believing prayer, on the part of the first Protestant missionary to China, in the face of extraordinary difficulties and discouragements ; having been ably assisted in his arduous labour during part of the time by the zealous Milne, who eventually succumbed under the severity of the toil. Morrison gave due and accurate credit to Milne for the share he had in the work ; at the same time acknowledging the obligation he was under to the manuscript in the British Museum. Still he never gave this out as a perfect translation. It is indeed a remarkable production, as being chiefly the work of two European missionaries ; for the native assistants who aided them in their work, it is to be believed, were not of very high standing in the literary scale. Under the circumstances, we cannot too highly value the efforts of Morrison and Milne, while every Chinese scholar must be conscious of the deficiencies of their version. As might be expected, the attempt to render it literal, has degenerated into a style of composition intolerably unidiomatic, and disfigured by a profusion of barbarisms. It is, however, faithful ; and while it cannot be expected to rank among the literary productions of the empire, or to be acceptable to the fastidious taste of native scholars, yet we have reason to believe that it has been instrumental in shedding the light of divine truth on the minds of many of the votaries of paganism.

Soon after Morrison's return from England in 1826, he entered into correspondence regarding the version, with the Rev. W. H. Medhurst, who had been about ten years in the China Mission, the result of which was an invitation to the latter to attempt a new translation. But doubting at that time his own proficiency, Dr. Medhurst tells us, and conceiving that while Dr. Morrison lived, he would be the fittest person to set about the work, he gave up all idea of prosecuting the scheme any further,

until circumstances and necessities again forced the subject on his attention. The importance of a thorough revision and correction, however, seems to have struck Morrison with greater force, the longer he continued in the mission field, and with that candour and disinterested truthfulness which ever marked his course, he was ready to sanction any steps which might be taken for the improvement of the version. His son, John Robert Morrison, shewed great aptitude in acquiring the Chinese language; and it was the expressed hope of the father that at some future day, he might revise Morrison and Milne's version of the Holy Scriptures.

A new and handsome edition of the Bible was issued about 1830; but, with the exception of a few slight verbal alterations, it does not appear to have undergone much emendation or revision. Notwithstanding the great encouragement which had been received, however, it was felt that much still remained to be done, in order to render the Word of Life into that free and intelligible style that we have it in every European language. The missionaries who were engaged in explaining the Scriptures to enquirers became painfully sensible of the difficulties they had to cope with, in bringing the Chinese to understand the sense of God's word. Their misapprehension of the true meaning, and the disposition they frequently manifested to put a wrong construction on what appeared to the missionaries the plainest passages, greatly disturbed the minds of their instructors. Some of these difficulties doubtless originated in the nature of the subject, and will continue to present themselves after the most perfect translation, until worn down by a more familiar acquaintance with Christian truth. But the chief drawback in the first translation was its excessively unidiomatical style, and the great and needless abundance of barbarisms.

In accordance with the wish above stated, Dr. Morrison proposed that his son should undertake the revision; in which he was supported by the American Bible Society. That body had actually made provision for sustaining Mr. J. R. Morrison in the undertaking, and were determined to carry him through with it at any expense, when the death of Dr. Morrison entirely disarranged the plan; for the son having succeeded to his father's office as Government Translator, had little time comparatively to devote to the object.

Practical measures were then adopted, however, for securing a new translation, and no one was better qualified for the work than Mr. Medhurst, who was at Canton at the time. Associated

with him in the work were the Rev. C. Gutzlaff, and the Rev. E. C. Bridgman ; while Mr. J. R. Morrison devoted what time he could spare from his official duties to aid in perfecting the translation. With the assistance of several native scholars, these gentlemen completed the New Testament before the end of 1835 ; after which, by the concurrent advice of the brethren, it was put to press in three different places—Singapore, Serampore and Batavia.

The following year, circumstances having rendered it necessary that Mr. Medhurst should return to England, the joint labours of the translators were in a measure arrested ; but not before they had reached the end of Joshua. It was then agreed that the several portions of the remainder should be allotted to Mr. Medhurst and Mr. Gutzlaff, who should transmit their respective portions to each other, for the inspection of all parties engaged.

While in England, Mr. Medhurst used all his influence with the London Missionary and Bible Societies, to get them to sanction a new translation ; but the high respect entertained for the attainments of Morrison, together with the counter influence at work, had the effect of frustrating Mr. Medhurst's design ; and the Directors, failing to appreciate the arguments used against the work of Morrison, refused to adopt the newly proposed version. In this they evidently fell into an error, for the work of Medhurst was a decided improvement on the former. The way was preparing however ; the old version was being tested, and time was given for the formation of opinions ; new sinologues were entering the field and acquiring qualifications, fitting them to engage in the work ; while political events were about to open the way for the entrance of missionaries into China, and enable them to procure native assistance of a far higher standard than could be got in the Straits Settlements, or even at Canton under the old arrangement. By the efforts and enterprise of Mr. Gutzlaff, the new translation of the Old Testament was completed and published.

The zeal and devotion of the Rev. S. Dyer to the mission cause is well known, and from the time of his arrival in the Straits in 1827, he was a diligent student of the Chinese Bible, losing no opportunity of commending it to the Chinese within his reach. While engaged in the duties of his vocation, he was gradually led to see the imperfections of the existing version, and became more and more impressed with the importance and necessity of a thorough revision. Every object of pursuit with

him seems to have been brought to bear on this subject, and the productions of his pen shew the deep interest he took in it. In 1839, he had occasion to visit England, and while there took every opportunity of urging upon the Bible and Missionary Societies the necessity of a thorough revision; and was so far successful as to induce a feeling in favour of the long cherished scheme.

Soon after this a new field of enterprise was opened for the servants of Christ in China. By the treaties of 1843, five ports were made accessible to foreign residents, and the island of Hongkong was ceded to Great Britain. Most of the missionaries from the Straits removed to China; and, under the circumstances, a conference of the various denominations was resolved on, to take into consideration the state of the Chinese versions of the Scriptures.

Four Societies were represented, one English, two American and one local; and the result of six meetings was the allotment of the New Testament in five portions to be translated by the missionaries at the respective ports, subject to a final revision in concert.

In the summer of 1847, the work of the several local Committees being in an advanced stage, a general Committee of Delegates from the several ports was convoked and met at the house of Dr. Medhurst at Shanghai in June. With the exception of a few months the same year, during which there was a cessation, the work was continued without intermission till the 24th July, 1850, when the New Testament was brought to a completion, and the labours of the Committee ended. Day after day the Committee met at the house of Dr. Medhurst, the President, aided by the co-operation of four or five native scholars, some of them men of superior qualifications. The proceedings are thus described by the Rev. W. C. Milne, a member of the Committee:—"Under the able and skilful leadership of this linguist, who was elected as Chairman, the translatorial engagements of the delegation were commenced upon the New Testament, following the 'Textus receptus,' in deference to the Bible Society's suggestion. Our sessions occurred daily, opened with reading a portion of the Sacred Scriptures and prayer, and extended from 10 o'clock A.M. to half-past 2 o'clock P.M. The method of proceeding in Committee was to consider verse by verse, word by word, allowing each individual opportunity to propose any alteration that he might deem desirable. The several members of the delegation had their native tutors with

them, three of whom continued with us for six years in our daily sittings, rendering most valuable assistance. Each day before adjournment, the portion of the Scripture to be considered at the next meeting was specified, and a rough draught of its translation offered by the Chairman, so that each member might duly examine and compare the same."¹

A few days after its completion, it was formally given out, with the imprimatur of the Delegates, the Rt. Rev. Bishop Boone, Rev. Drs. Medhurst and Bridgman and the Revs. J. Stronach and W. C. Milne; the work of the Committee having been thus finally brought to a close; and the result of their labours, the admirable translation known as the Delegates' version, which has since been so extensively circulated.

Soon after this, another Committee of Delegates was assembled at Shanghai for the translation of the Old Testament; but after a few months a division took place among the members, and the result gave rise to two versions instead of one. One was carried through by the Revs. Dr. Medhurst, J. Stronach and W. C. Milne, and completed in 1853, uniform in style with the Delegates' version of the New Testament. Contemporaneously with the preceding, the Revs. Dr. Bridgman and Mr. Culbertson were engaged in a translation of the whole Bible, differing somewhat in style. With the exception of intervals, during which they each visited their native land, the work was continued till its completion in 1862; this being the fifth complete translation of the Bible into the Chinese language.

Dr. Marshman's translation of the Bible was specially used by the Baptist missionaries; but increasing dissatisfaction with the version induced the American Baptist Board of Foreign Missions to send out the Rev. Josiah Goddard, with a special view to carry through a new translation. Ill health and various missionary duties combined to retard the progress of his work. The New Testament was completed by him, and printed in 1853. The following year he died at Ningpo, while engaged in his labours on the Old Testament, the translation of which has since been carried on by the Rev. Dr. Dean, of Bangkok.

The Rev. T. H. Hudson, of Ningpo, has for many years been occupied with a revision of the New Testament, which has recently been brought to a completion and published.

The only other translation of the New Testament in the book style of which I am aware is that by the Russian Mission, published at Peking in 1864.

¹ *Life in China.* pp 504, 505.

Besides the Old Testament, it may be mentioned that Gutzlaff published a modification of Medhurst's version of the New Testament, or rather the version upon which they had been working in concert. This went through some ten or more editions, being each time revised under the superintendence of Dr. Gutzlaff.

It was one of the earlier editions of this that was ultimately printed by the T'ae-p'ing rebels. At first they published it in its original purity, but in subsequent editions it was much altered by members of their own fraternity.

The Old Testament was partially published by them, but never completed I believe.

Next to the literary versions, the most important of the dialects is the Mandarin, as being the colloquial medium of a large proportion of the people of China. Scarcely had Dr. Medhurst completed his labours on the Old Testament, when he commenced a translation of the New Testament into the Mandarin language, in concert with the Rev. J. Stronach. This was first published in 1856.

A Committee has been engaged for the last three years in Peking on a new version into the Mandarin, suited more particularly to the northern part of China. Another year will probably see the completion of the work.

The whole New Testament has been published in the Ningpo dialect; and several editions of the New Testament in the Fuh-chow Amoy dialects have been put through the press.

Detached portions of the Scriptures have also been published in several other dialects.

Such is a very summary outline of the stages by which Bible translation in China has reached its present state of perfection; and it is hazarding nothing to say that as a literary composition, and a faithful transcript of the original, it stands unsurpassed in the history of translations into Chinese.

We deem it a great thing to have a good version of the Scriptures, but this is not the ultimate aim. It is one thing to have the book, and another to be able to circulate it. Indispensable as is the former, the latter is the great object which Christian philanthropists have kept in view from the beginning; and for this end the various Bible Societies of Great Britain and America have contributed liberally their funds.

In the early days of the China Mission, the printing and circulation of the Scriptures, even on the borders of the empire, was a question of penalties, stripes and imprisonment; and it was

found necessary to remove to Malacca, or some place outside the empire, in order to carry on the printing to any great extent. The first tour made for the circulation of the Scriptures among the Chinese was by the Rev. W. Milne in 1814. On that occasion he visited Rhio, Banca, Java and the islands of the Malayan Archipelago, and distributed several hundred Testaments among the Chinese settlers. The work was carried on for years by the missionaries at the various stations, several of whom made special voyages in the interest of the British and Foreign Bible Society. But the importance of the operations assumed such a magnitude in the eyes of Dr. Morrison, that in 1824 he made an earnest request to the Society that a special Agent might be employed in promoting their interest in that quarter; a proposal which was cordially seconded by Sir Thomas Stamford Raffles, the Governor of Sumatra. Although the request was approved by the directors, the matter had to stand over for several years, till Mr. Lay went out as their Agent, and arrived at Macao towards the close of 1836. The difficulty of gaining access however to the mainland of China was such as entirely to cripple his efforts regarding that country, and after nearly three years spent in the Straits and among the islands chiefly, he returned to England. Events were progressing, however, towards the opening of the country. By the treaty of Nanking, five ports were made accessible, and at each of these the representatives of Missionary Societies were established.

In 1854 a remarkable concurrence of events took place. While the Christian public of England were celebrating the Jubilee of the British and Foreign Bible Society, news was arriving from China of the great revolutionary movement that was in progress. The fact that a powerful party, in successful revolt, was maintaining the cardinal points of the Christian faith, and actually printing and publishing the Christian Scriptures, was sufficient to draw forth the religious sympathy of Christians. At the period alluded to, when it was thought the country would speedily be thrown open to Christian teachers, the Rev. J. Angell James, one of the oldest and warmest friends of the Bible Society, came forward with a proposal to raise a fund to supply China with *a million* copies of the New Testament. The call was warmly responded to, and the funds were raised without difficulty. A large portion of the million was printed, and native colporteurs were employed in various parts of China, under the immediate direction of the missionaries; but the circulation did not advance so rapidly as had been expected.

In 1863, the British and Foreign Bible Society again adopted the plan of appointing a special Agent to take the charge of their affairs in China, where he arrived about the end of the year. Having already had some experience in circulating books among the people, he was impressed with the disadvantages of a gratuitous distribution, and felt that if the natives could be got to give a small price for the books, it would be beneficial in several respects. But the matter had to be tested, and while he was fully convinced of the importance of the principle of sale, he was by no means sure of success. A trial however soon decided the question, and it was found that the the principle of sale for a small sum was far more practicable than gratuitous distribution. Native colporteurs have been appointed at Peking, Tientsin, Kewkeang, Hankow, Shanghai, Fuhchow, Amoy, Hongkong, Canton and at several points in the interior of the province. Most of these natives travel over the country by themselves; but it has been found profitable sometimes to have Europeans accompanied by Chinese: and two or three have accordingly been engaged in this service. The object of the Society is to send the Scriptures to every corner of the empire, and keeping this in view, instead of mere desultory efforts, it has been the Agent's plan to go methodically over the country by means of his various employees, as far as the scheme is practicable, leaving no town, city or village, without an offer of the Scriptures. The price has been fixed so low as to place it within reach of almost the poorest to obtain at least a Gospel, if they cannot purchase a complete New Testament, and yet high enough to cut off the probability of people purchasing them for improper uses. We have thus an excellent means of testing how far the people really desire the books for their own sake; and after some four years' experience I have no hesitation in saying that there is a very general desire on the part of the people to obtain our books.

Thirteen¹ out of eighteen provinces have thus been visited by our agency. In some of these, our operations have as yet been very limited; in others, there are few cities or towns where the Scriptures have not been circulated. Of the 267 prefectures and departments into which the whole empire is divided, we have introduced our book into more than a third. In the provinces south of Chekiang, the selling system has scarcely been adopted, and my statistics from those parts are not very precise. But from Fuhkien northward, our circulation has been entirely by sale; and on that principle the New Testament has already been largely

¹ Since this article was read to the meeting, the writer has made a tour through

distributed in more than three hundred walled cities, besides about 1200 towns and villages ; in all, upwards of two hundred thousand volumes during the past four years.

These statements refer altogether to the agency of the British and Foreign Bible Society ; but the result will be greatly augmented, if we consider the labours of the Rev. A. Williamson, the Agent of the National Bible Society of Scotland, whose appointment dates from the same period. Besides these, a number of col-porteurs have been actively engaged in the service of the American Bible Society for some years past ; and although I do not know the extent of their circulation, there is reason to believe that they have been earnest and diligent in the work.

By the general voice of Christendom, the Bible is acknowledged to be the Word of God. I believe that voice is not mistaken, Entertaining such a belief, I rejoice in maintaining the principle of our Society, which is to circulate the Bible without note or comment ; and since the commencement of my agency, I have never distributed a page of other matter along with it. In thus prohibiting the distribution of other books by those engaged in the service of the Society, we wish the Chinese to see that we do not place it on the same footing as tracts or other books: without depreciating other works, we wish them to understand that this is a book apart, and that we give it out as infallible—a predicate we refuse to any mere human composition. I believe the Bible is fitted by Him whose Word it is to raise mankind from the lowest depths, and that it is the right of every man and woman in the world to possess it. While by no means ignoring the efficacy and necessity of the Holy Spirit, to apply the truth to the heart and conscience, I yet believe there is a power inherent in the very words of Scripture; and that we may legitimately look for results from its perusal which no other book warrants us to expect. I believe in the value of disseminating a knowledge of the arts and sciences, and secular learning of every kind,—I believe in the progress of civilization,—I believe in the advancement of commerce ; but without the Word of God, I believe all these appliances will be powerless to raise the people in the social scale.

As Christians of all denominations hold the Bible to be the Word of God, when we meet together on this platform, we can happily lay aside denominational differences. Not only does this apply to the various bodies into which the Protestant Church is divided, but also to the Church of Rome and the Greek Church ; for we all unite in this article of faith. This was remarkably illustrated at the late Paris Exhibition, where the Society opened

a store, for the distribution of its wares. Moreover we can commend the Bible to any intelligent Mohammedan, without offending his prejudices, if he is familiar with the Koran; for the Scriptures are there habitually acknowledged and tacitly approved. These form a very numerous class of the Chinese population; and while it is easy to conceive how they might be irritated by mere polemic essays, it is a great advantage to have this common ground to meet them on.

The Chinese at large, as a people, are well able to appreciate our efforts in this direction; for it is no novelty with them to circulate books for the advancement of morality and religion. They are a reading people, and naturally anxious to obtain books. We merely take advantage of this inquisitive spirit, to put into their hands a book of inestimable value; and look to God to give his blessing on the transaction. So accustomed are they to meet with missionaries first, engaged in this work, that in some of the more distant regions, they unconsciously imbibe the notion that all foreigners come on the same errand; and hence a kindly feeling is generated, which only waits to be drawn out and cultivated, by the reciprocation of a genial bearing towards them. I do not ignore the difficulties of opening up new ground having had experience in that matter; but what I say is, that the tendency of our work is to conciliate the fears and apprehensions of a suspicious people; and thus while we are imparting to them what we conceive to be the greatest boon, we are actually the pioneers in opening up the country to foreign intercourse.

